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ABSTRACT

Head Start parents who were poorly trained for the transition of their children from Head Start to the public school were assisted as they went through a structured training program. The parents' children were 3 and 4 years old, and lived in a rural community in the southwestern United States. The population was 5 percent Black, 2 percent American Indian, 39 percent Mexican-American, and 54 percent Caucasian. A parent group had been incorporated in 1974, but parents did not know what to expect, or what was expected of them, in regard to the preparation of their children for participation in the public school system. Information needs in such areas as school discipline policies and enrollment procedures were cited. A training and information system was developed to address parent concerns. As a result, the parents were able to increase their awareness of the need to be involved in their children's education. Parents were also involved in the development of a parent transition handbook and a transition agreement between the Head Start program and the public school. It was concluded that parent training and involvement throughout the transition process would be mandatory for all Head Start programs. Appended are a checklist for parents on their needs for information, and a parent pre-test and post-test. Contains 5 references. (Author/LB)

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Developing A Training Program For Head Start Parents In Preparation For Public School Transition Of Their Children

by

Sherry P. Ulmer

Cohort XXXIX

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A Practicum Report Presented to the
Master's Program for Child and Youth Care Administrators
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree of Master of Science

NOVA UNIVERSITY
1991

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My signature below documents my acknowledgement of the practicum project of Sherry P. Ulmer. As Executive Director of our agency, she has identified a problem related to transition of Head Start parents into the public school system. Her practicum project involved training for parents and a joint effort with the public school in solving the problem. The transition plan, parent handbook and training plan will be a valuable asset to this agency.

Practicum Title "Developing a Training Program For Head Start Parents In Preparation For Public School Transition Of Their Children

Student's Name Sherry P. Ulmer, Executive Director

Cohort XXXIX Date 9-11-91

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AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. Where it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other workers in the field and in the hope that my own work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

9-11-91
Date

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Abstract

Developing a training program for Head Start Parents in preparation for public school transition of their children. Ulmer, Sherry, 1991; Practicum Report, NOVA University, Master's Program for Child Care Administrators. Descriptors; Parent Training/ Head Start-School Roles/ Parent-School Relationships/ Parent Education/ Parent Participation/ Parent Child Relationships/Transitional Programs

The author identified, researched, and verified a management problem in her work site. Head Start parents were poorly trained in the transition of their child from Head Start to the public school. Through a structured training program, the practicum author was able to assist parents to increase their awareness of the need to be involved in their child's education as well as to involve them in the development of a Parent Transition Handbook. Parents also participated in the development of the Transition Agreement between Head Start and the Public School.

The parcticum experience produced a solution to the author's identified problem and will be implemented throughout the agency on an on-going basis.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The setting for the practicum was a Head Start program which serves three and four year old low-income children in a rural county located in the Southwestern part of the United States. The program is funded under the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Head Start. There are no fees for this program as parents must qualify under the income guidelines. The program also receives State funds to operate a developmental delayed program for children zero to five years old.

The two county program has been in existence since 1974 when the local parent group became incorporated and was the first private non-profit parent group to receive funding directly from Region IX. Of the 13 communities in the two counties, there was a Head Start center in every area except on designated Indian Reservations. Currently there are 425 children being served four days per week, three and one-half hours per day from September through May. There are 52 full-time staff which includes administrators, support staff and the teaching staff. Part-time staff totals 17 and includes janitors, bus drivers and special needs aides.

The population served was five percent Blacks, 39 percent Mexican-American, two percent Indians and 54 percent Caucasian. Economically, the areas are rural cotton farming lacking industrial development in most of the communities. Over 80 percent of the parents served lacked a high school diploma/GED or any formal education. Many were concerned how they would be able to help their children in the school system and for many there was a language barrier with 17 percent speaking Spanish only.

In order to enhance parent involvement in the program, Wednesdays were set aside for parent workshops, home visits and for parents to attend classes with their child and work together in the classroom on individual needs of the child.

Recently the program was the first in the state to have all of its centers accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The writer is the executive director of the agency and was instrumental in helping the parent group to become incorporated in 1974. An employee of the Head Start program since 1969, the writer has held several positions including secretary, fiscal officer, administrative assistant and Head Start director prior to becoming executive director. The writer holds a BA degree in Management.

As executive director, responsibilities for this

position include grant writing, budgeting for the million dollar plus grant as well as preparing 13 individual budgets for each center, hiring and firing staff, staff development (needs assessments, establishing training needs and career counseling), parent training, planning, yearly program evaluation as well as the overall operation of the program.

For the past 11 years the writer had served as a member of a local school board. The experience of the writer comes not only from working with parents of low-income preschoolers but with parents of all age children through the public school.

Chapter 2

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Statement

At the time there was no specific training plan to prepare parents for the transition of their Head Start preschool child into the public school system. In order for children to be successful in the schools, parents must be able to support their child and know what is expected of the child as well as the family. Parents also have the right to know what they can expect from the public schools The training must include at a minimum, what tests will be performed on the child, documentation requirements such as birth certificates, immunization records, etc., school regulations, curriculum, policies for parent participation and a support system within the school for parents.

The program at the time had no documented training program for parents. At a minimum, staff helped with kindergarten recruitment day, encouraged parents to attend school activities for pre-kindergarten and met with the teacher in early spring.

Documentation

Although the practicum site did provide minimal transition activities for the parents, the concern was the

lack of a written structured training program between the public school and the Head Start site. Families were not assisted in any special way and were not expected or requested to become involved other than the normal parent teacher conferences, open house activities and the PTA.

Several site meetings had been held unofficially with the school to discuss the problems facing low-income families and their involvement with the school. The school staff consisting of the principal, teachers, school nurse and social service workers felt parent involvement was a serious problem, but was not sure what to do about it and was willing to work with the Head Start site. The author along with other Head Start staff felt there were major differences in attitudes between the public school structure and the expectations of Head Start for the involvement of parents.

In March, 1991 a checklist (Appendix A:25) was distributed to 15 Head Start parents to gather information on what the parent priorities were to prepare their child for public school. Eight of the parents rated the number one priority for training to know what the school policies were as they related to discipline. Three parents felt their priority was to know more about the testing requirements and would like to review the curriculum prior to school beginning. Four parents listed their priority as to what required information was needed to enroll their

child. Several parents wrote under comments that they were concerned what was expected of their child and if the child would be successful. The other comment was the parent had a bad experience with the school and worried the school would also harm her child in the same way.

The author spoke with Head Start teachers as well as public school teachers, both felt it was imperative that the parents become more involved with the education of their children. The public school teachers also felt the school should institute a policy of working more closely with parents to get them involved along with the Head Start program.

If 15 parents felt helpless and lost when their child goes into the public school system and would like more training and information through structured planning, the question arose as to whether other parents would and could benefit from the same.

Analysis

It is necessary to have an effective training/ information system in order to encourage parent involvement from Head Start to the public school system. The current site policy did not address parent concerns or identify what the role of the public school system should be.

After speaking with Head Start staff as well as public school staff, the author felt there had been an identified

need of collaboration by the two systems which had affected the trust of parents. A comprehensive training/information system was lacking that would give parents the opportunity to become involved and to be better able to make good decisions about the education of their child.

A review of the literature demonstrated that parent involvement is considered to be a key factor in a child's school achievement. One such group felt the quality and nature of the parent-child relationship and how the parent perceives the school may be the cause for poor school achievement (Morrison, 1978). "Encouraging a high degree of family enthusiasm for their children's public school and child care centers is one of the best ways in which teachers can attempt to build children's self-esteem and can reduce discipline procedures and can boost children's regard for themselves as learners" Greenberg, (1989:61). Ms. Greenberg goes on to state that parents who feel inadequate or unhappy going to the school can be more harmful instead of helpful to their child through their involvement. For this reason it is imperative that schools work to make all parents welcome

Because Head Start is built on the premise that the parents are the primary educators of their children, for years programs have initiated some kind of transition activities for the children. In the Spring of 1986, 15 Head Start programs were awarded funds to conduct a 2-year

demonstration project to launch a special initiative to make transition from preschool to kindergarten less stressful for Head Start children and their families (Waxler, Thompson & Poblete, 1990). Although a great deal of activities were provided for the children, there was still a minimum of training/information for the parents.

Opening the information channels according to (Waxler Thompson and Poblete) between Head Start parents and the public school staff is probably the most important aspect of the transition process. The Mille Lacs Reservation Head Start program in Minnesota was funded in 1987 to increase parent knowledge about the public school; provide activities and materials for parents to assist their child in readiness skills and to develop a communication system among parents, public school staff and the Head Start program. Along with a 4-week Kindergarten readiness program for the children, the program also presented a session for parents on developmental stages of kindergarten children, public school expectations for the kindergarten year and an opportunity for the parents to observe a kindergarten class and talk with the teacher. Three-quarters of the parents participated in the sessions. Parents were in general, pleased with the transition efforts, however some indicated a need for more information, more academic preparation for their child and more visits to the elementary school (Waxler, Thompson and Poblete, 1990).

With the increasing number of children Head Start is serving, educators are becoming increasingly aware of opportunities and benefits associated with transition plans from Head Start to public school. Developmental gains achieved in the Head Start program can only be maintained if Head Start and the public school establish programs that include the parents. The role of the parent changes from Head Start to public schools in that parents of elementary school children will be less involved in decision making, have less access to the teacher and less opportunity to participate in the classroom activities. There is again the comfort zone for parents where they may not feel as welcome in the public school as in Head Start. Parents actively trained and informed in the transition process can be the key to their child educational success.

Chapter 3

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals and Objectives

The goal of this practicum was to develop a training program that would help prepare Head Start parents for the transition of their child into public school.

Practicum objectives to be accomplished during the 10-weeks were:

1. To involve 12 of the 15 parents previously surveyed in a 10 week training program.
2. Parents participating in the training program will test at 90% or above on the post test.
3. Develop a parent transition handbook with appropriate information.
4. Develop a written transition plan between the Head Start Program and the public school.

Goal Evaluation

The goal and objectives were to evaluated through a pre/post test process (Appendix B and C:27, 29). The purpose of the test was to survey the knowledge level of the parents regarding public school requirements, parent rights, discipline procedures and developmentally appropriate activities for parents to encourage and support their child' education. The pre-test was given at the

orientation meeting and the post-test at the final training session. Parents were requested to sign in at each session to document participation. The parent handbook and written transition plan is to be implemented in the coming year and will not be available for evaluation until then.

Chapter 4

SOLUTION STRATEGIES

Information Collection

A review of the literature revealed approaches to transition from preschool to kindergarten are done in a variety of ways, mostly with the child and not necessarily with the parents.

Transition (ACYF Publication, 1988) reviewed several models being implemented through-out the country; Maricopa County Head Start held workshops for parents of children with special needs. Boulder County Head Start concentrates on family, record-keeping and program awareness in their transition program. The Topeka Kansas Head Start program has had major accomplishments in their transition plan by increasing the cooperation between the school administrative staff, elementary principals and Head Start.

Greenberg (1989) states that family endorsement of school seems to affect children's self-esteem, self-discipline, mental health and long term aspiration. Ms. Greenberg further states positive participation by a member of the child's family even briefly and infrequently helps the child's self-esteem to soar.

In reviewing parent participation in the public school

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Mitchell and Modigliani (1989) stated parent involvement is critical in programs for young children. Long term gains attributed to early childhood programs depend upon the parents taking an active role in their child's education. Parent involvement such as parent workshops and advisory councils are rare in the public schools except in Head Start and subsidized child care programs operated by the public school.

Solution Strategies

The author's search found few resources that directly provide training for parents in how or what to expect in the transition process. Two programs in the state include parents in an "open house" or "kindergarten day" and called that a transition program. All the programs within the author's state have tried several different approaches in working with the pre-kindergarten children, again not directly providing any specific training with or for parents.

In order to achieve the practicum objectives it was necessary to focus on three separate components. First, the training component which was to involve the parents and present the information they felt was important per the checklist (Appendix A:25). The training addressed not only Head Start issues but included presentations from school administrators as well.

The second important component was the development of a parent handbook. The handbook addressed school policies such as discipline, testing requirements and enrollment requirements. Included also is a school directory, parents rights and appropriate curriculum information and activities.

Last, the third component task addressed the development of a transition agreement between the Head Start Program and the public school. The agreement includes activities, time lines, designated responsibilities of each agency and a review/evaluation process.

Implementation Plan

The practicum author has approval and support from her agency as well as the local school district to implement this program. As the school will be operating several summer programs, children and adults, the training will take place at the school's Family Resource Center. This will also insure school staff are a part of the training. The time line for implementation is listed on the following chart (Chart 1). The author is responsible for all phases.

Chart 1

Practicum Time Line

STRATEGIES	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT
1 Sign-up 12 of the 15 parents in the previous study group interviewed	20					
2 Orientation meeting and pre-test	24					
3 Prepare training program	30					
4 Implement training program		3 <-+--------+-> 9				
5 Develop parent handbook		3 <-+---->26				
6 Present handbook to parents				5		
7 Revise handbook with parents input				12		
8 Administer post-test				9		
9 Develop written transition agreement		24<--+---->19				
10 Parent handbook printed				30		
11 Transition agreement approved and signed by appropriate school and Head Start officials				30		
12 Final report to NOVA					20	
13 End of cohort extension						31

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

WEEK 1: a) Parent pre-test
b) Training session: Transition to Kindergarten
Trainer - author

WEEK 2: a) Training Session: Parent Involvement in the Transition Process
Trainer - Family Service Coordinator and Public School Family Resource Director

WEEK 3: a) Training Session: Parents Rights and Responsibilities
Trainer - author and Special Needs Coordinator

WEEK 4: a) Training Session: Working With School Personnel
Trainer - School Principal and PTA Officers

WEEK 5: a) Training Session: Public School Testing
Trainer - Education Coordinator

WEEK 6: a) Training Session: School Discipline and Attendance Policy
Trainer - School Principal

WEEK 7: a) Training Session: Documentation Process
Trainer - Head Start Teacher
b) Develop written Transition Agreement

WEEK 8: a) Training Session: School Curriculum
Trainer - School Vice-Principal

WEEK 9: a) Training Session: Reviewing Parent Transition Handbook
Trainer - author

WEEK 10: a) Training Session: Learning at Home
Trainer - Head Start Home Visitor
b) Parent Post-Test
c) Transition Agreement approved and signed

Follow on

At the conclusion of this project, the author had not only trained several parents in working with their children but also has established a collaborative unity with the public school. Through the written transition agreement, the training efforts will go on all year, not just for a day or a week.

The parent handbook was also a collaborative effort with input from the school and Head Start parents. The Head Start program will be responsible for the printing and distribution of the handbook.

In the fall, the practicum author will train site staff in all fourteen communities so that the transition plan might be used in all of the service areas. Contact with other schools will be made also to implement a similar program in other sites.

Chapter 5

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Objective Outcomes

The first objective was to get 80% or 12 parents of the original surveyed involved in a 10 week training program. A series of weekly training sessions were organized by the author. The response was as follows:

Session One: At the first session five out of 15 parents participated. The pre-test was given then the author started the training titled "Transition to Kindergarten". The parents in attendance were enthusiastic and excited about the program.

Session Two: The training "Parent Involvement in the Transition Process" was presented by the Head Start Family Service Coordinator and the Director of the Public School Family Resource Center. Five out of 15 parents were in attendance.

Session Three: The training "Parents Rights and Responsibilities" was presented by the author and the Head Start Special Needs Coordinator. Only 4 out of 15 parents participated. We

also started work on the development of a transition handbook for parents

Session Four: The training "Working with School Personnel" was presented by the School Principal and the PTA President who is also a Head Start parent. 7 out of 15 parents were in attendance.

Session Five: The training "Public School Testing" was presented by the Head Start Education Coordinator. 4 out of 15 parents were in attendance.

Session Six: The training "School Discipline and Attendance Policy" was presented by the School Principal. 8 out of 15 parents participated.

Session Seven: The training "Documentation Process" was presented by a Head Start Teacher. 3 out of 15 parents participated. We also started to develop a written transition agreement. Parents in attendance gave some excellent ideas on the activities they would like to see the school do in conjunction with Head Start.

Session Eight: The training "School Curriculum" was presented by the school Vice-Principal. 3

out 15 parents were in attendance. We also discussed ideas for more activities to be included in the transition agreement and reviewed the draft copy of the parent handbook.

Session Nine: At this session the author presented the final draft of the Parent Transition Handbook. 4 out 15 parents were in attendance and very excited about the book.

Session Ten: The training "Learning at Home" was presented by the Head Start Home Visitor. 5 out of 15 parents were in attendance. The parent post test was given.

Attendance at the training sessions was poor however, those in attendance were excited about the materials presented as well as the trainers. Parents participating felt that summer was a bad time due to babysitting problems, vacations, etc. and that the trainings should be given toward the end of the school, maybe March or April. For these reasons, the author did not meet her number one objective which was to have 80% or 12 parents out of 15 to participate in the training sessions. At the most 8 parents were in attendance and least amount was 3.

Objective two the author found much easier to meet. The goal was to have parents test at 90% or above on the

post test. Parents taking the post-test, 3 tested out at 100% and 2 parents at 83%. The author feels the training sessions were the reason most of the parents were able to score so high.

Objective three was successful by the completion of a parent transition handbook. The parents who participated worked go gather information they felt should be included in the book, gave their recommendations and felt the project had been worthwhile

Objective four was also successful in that a written transition plan between Head Start and the Public School has been designed and will be implemented this fall. Parents once again support the plan and worked closely with the school to insure several activities would take place in a joint Head Start - Public School project.

Conclusions

In the study of this problem and in the development of the solution, the practicum author has concluded that parent training and involvement throughout the transition process is not only highly desirable but should be mandatory for all Head Start programs.

The implementation of this practicum has given value to the author's work place. By involving parents in a weekly basis, supporting two way communication with the school and parents, we now have a stronger relationship as a group

working for the betterment of our children and not as individuals. We have also made parents more aware of the importance of being involved in their childrens education.

Plans have been made so that the training sessions will be given in the author's work place starting in February reviewing the Transition Plan. Parent Handbook and implementation of the 10 week training sessions with presenters from the school as well as Head Start. Plans are that this will be done not only at one site, but to include all 13 of the agency sites.

Recommendations

The author recommends that all agency's working with preschool children, follow the example of this practicum. Not only can it make your agency stronger, it can bridge your relationship with the public school and most importantly make for a more knowledgeable parent.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

PARENT CHECKLIST

Check the following areas you would like training or more information in order to prepare your child for public school. Please rank the questions which are the most important to the least important to you.

1. School information such as: Principal's name, names of current kindergarten teachers, dates for registration, telephone numbers of school.

   Priority # _____

2. Required information for child to be enrolled in school such as; birth certificate, immunization records, etc.

   Priority # _____

3. Procedure to communication from the school to the home such as; parent conferences, newsletter telephone calls, etc.

   Priority # _____

4. Requirements for testing and what curriculum will be used in kindergarten.

   Priority # _____

5. What school policies are on; attendance, discipline, grading, etc.

   Priority # _____

Appendix B

PARENT PRE-TEST

1. Do you know the name of your child's school principal, address of the school and telephone number?

YES_____ NO_____ SOME_____

2. Are you aware of what documentation is needed in order for you to register your child in public school?

YES_____ NO_____ SOME_____

3. Are your familiar with the schools discipline, grading and attendance policies?

YES_____ NO_____ SOME_____

4. Are you familiar with the kindergarten curriculum and what will be expected of your child?

YES_____ NO_____ SOME_____

5. Did you attend any of the transition day activities at the end of the school?

YES_____ NO_____ SOME_____

Appendix C

PARENT POST-TEST

1. Do you know the name of your child's school principal, address of the school and telephone number?

YES_____ NO_____ SOME_____

2. Are you aware of what documentation is needed in order for you to register your child in public school?

YES_____ NO_____ SOME_____

3. Are your familiar with the schools discipline, grading and attendance policies?

YES_____ NO_____ SOME_____

4. Are you familiar with the kindergarten curriculum and what will be expected of your child?

YES_____ NO_____ SOME_____

5. Do you feel the parent handbook will benefit you?

YES_____ NO_____ SOME_____

6. Have you benefited from the training program?

YES_____ NO_____ SOME_____

Comments: